Indiana State Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Tuberculosis

What is tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is a disease caused by bacteria that are spread from person to person through the air. Although TB usually affects the lungs, it can also affect other parts of the body such as the kidneys, spine, and brain. Without proper treatment, TB can be fatal.

There were 102 cases of TB disease in Indiana in 2012.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The symptoms of active TB disease of the lungs include:

- a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- pain in the chest
- coughing up blood
- weight loss
- sweating at night
- weakness or fatigue
- fever
- chills

How is TB spread?

People with active TB disease of the lungs or throat can release TB bacteria into the air when they cough, sneeze, speak, or sing. These bacteria can stay in the air for several hours. Other people can breathe in and then become infected by these bacteria.

Who is at risk for getting TB?

People with active TB disease are most likely to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day, such as family members or coworkers. *If you have been around someone who has active TB disease, see your health care provider right away.* Some people are more likely than others to develop active TB disease once they have been infected: children under five, people with HIV infection, people whose immune system is compromised, people who were recently exposed to someone with active TB disease, and people with certain medical conditions.

How do I know if I have TB?

See your health care provider. There are two tests that can help detect TB infection. A tuberculin skin test is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid into the skin in the forearm. A person given the test must return within 48-72 hours to have a trained health care worker check the injection site for a reaction. A blood test can also measure how the patient's immune system reacts to the bacteria that cause TB. A positive test by either method only shows that a person has been infected with TB germs; these tests do not show whether or not the person has developed active TB disease. Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and a sputum sample, are needed to determine whether the person has active TB disease.

How is TB treated?

Active TB disease can be cured by taking several drugs for 6-12 months. People who have active TB disease take all of the medicine exactly as prescribed. If they stop taking the drugs too soon, they can become sick again. If they do not take the drugs exactly as prescribed, the bacteria that are still alive may become resistant to those drugs. TB that is resistant to drugs is harder and more expensive to treat. Because of this, directly observed therapy (DOT) – when a health care worker watches the TB patient take their medications - is practiced in Indiana. DOT helps the patient complete treatment in the least amount of time by ensuring that the patient takes the medicines properly.

How is TB prevented?

Avoid close contact or spending prolonged time with known TB patients in crowded, enclosed environments such as clinics, hospitals, prisons, or homeless shelters. Treatment of TB infection substantially reduces the risk that the infection will progress to active TB disease.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site: http://www.cdc.gov/tb.

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